PROTESTANTISM

ITS

ULTIMATE PRINCIPLE.

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Protestantism: its ultimate principle

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BY

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BIRMINGHAM.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE substance of this little volume was delivered, as a Lecture, in Exeter Hall, on March 2nd, 1874, and was repeated in the same place on March 23rd.

Several friends of mine, who heard the Lecture, have requested me to print it.

In complying with their request I have thrown aside some of the rhetorical accessories of the Lecture; but without re-writing it from end to end, it would have been impossible to redeem the argument from the rhetorical form which might have been allowable in a spoken address, but which is hardly suitable for a printed book.

It should be clearly understood, that the Committee of the Young Men's Christian

Association, which did me the honour of requesting me to deliver and to re-deliver the Lecture, has no kind of responsibility for what is now published. It is probable that in the Lecture itself there were a few things from which some members of the Committee would dissent; and there are many sentences and paragraphs in these pages which were not written till the Lecture was revised for publication.

R. W. DALE.

BIRMINGHAM,
March 13, 1874.

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INTRODUCTORY.

INTRODUCTORY.

WITHIN the last five-and-twenty years a great change has passed upon the spirit and temper of the English nation. I can remember the time when the antagonism with which for more than three hundred years the vast majority of the English people had regarded the Church of Rome, was one of the most powerful elements of our national life. It controlled our theological controversies; it was appealed to with confidence by the chiefs of political parties; its influence was obvious in our social intercourse. Roman Catholic priests were regarded with mingled distrust, contempt, and dread. The characteristic doctrines of the Roman Catholic

Church were spoken of with intellectual scorn; the pretensions of the Pope to infallibility, for instance—pretensions which at those times were not sustained by the authority of a General Council,—and the dogma of transubstantiation, were supposed to be too monstrous to require serious discussion; the invocation of saints and the homage offered to the Virgin Mary were treated as nothing better than idolatry, and reverence for relics as a childish superstition. All the instruments and apparatus of Romish worship, decorated altars, consecrated wafers, crucifixes, the gorgeous robes of the priests, were regarded as things which carried infection with them; and the worship itself as a profane insult to the majesty of God.

In those days it was customary to speak of the Jesuits as men who had reduced equivocation and lying to a science, and consecrated falsehood in the name of religion;

nor was there any crime from which it was imagined that a Jesuit would shrink if the interest of the Church appeared to require it. Most English people regarded the confessional with horror and disgust; it was an abomination not to be tolerated in a free and Christian community; an institution for corrupting the morals of women and for investing the priesthood with a dark and terrible power over the happiness of families and the liberties of nations. The Roman Catholic Church was the very symbol and representative of all the worst evils which can desolate Christendom; it had plunged Europe into darkness for centuries; it was the irreconcilable foe of intellectual freedom; it was the ally of political despotism; it had been guilty of falsehood and treachery, covetousness and ambition, and of cruelties more atrocious than had ever disgraced the worst form of paganism; it had repressed with fire and sword,

with the branding iron, the gibbet, and the stake, every noble struggle for truth and liberty; it had cursed, imprisoned, tortured, and burnt men of illustrious genius and heroic goodness; it had massacred thousands and tens of thousands of the common people who had dared to challenge its authority; it was drunk with the blood of saints. Atheism itself had an apology and a palliation in the superstition and crimes of this corrupt and tyrannical Church.

Speaking broadly, this was the creed of at least the vast majority of the English people a quarter of a century ago. Even then, indeed, in some quarters the ancient loyalty of the nation to Protestantism had begun to give way. There were clergymen and scholars who had learnt to look upon Romanism, not only with charity, but with sympathy. Among the aristocratic classes there was already a disposition to tolerate and even to

admire the external forms of Romish worship and certain Romish institutions. Some of the leaders of political parties, though willing enough at times to take advantage of the popular hatred of Romanism, were very much disposed to attempt the solution of English difficulties in Ireland by taking the Roman Catholic priesthood into the pay of the State. But the manufacturers, the tradesmen, and the professional men of the country seemed, at least, to be faithful to the principles and traditions of the Reformation; and the great masses of the working people had an intense abhorrence of Rome. What Dr. Newman has called the "Protestant prejudice" was, no doubt, to a very large extent both ignorant and unjust, but its intensity and depth can hardly be questioned.

It would take a long time to discuss the causes of the great change through which

the public mind has passed since then. The reality of the change is apparent. Crucifixes have become a common ornament of libraries and drawing-rooms. The services of hundreds of churches not belonging to the Roman communion approximate very closely to the Roman type. The doctrine of the Real Presence is openly taught from thousands of Anglican pulpits; and although that doctrine may not be identical with the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the difference between the two is philosophical and not religious. We hear of the "sacrifice of the Mass" where we used to hear of the "Holy Communion" or the "Lord's Supper." All over the country confession is recommended and practised as an aid to devoutness and purity of life. The odium which once attached to Roman Catholic persecutors is now heaped on their victims, the martyrs of the Reformation. Luther and Calvin are denounced as the worst of

men; and their influence on the religious thought and life of Europe is described as an unmixed calamity. The very name of Protestant is regarded with loathing. And while a powerful and rapidly increasing party in the English Church are striving to undo what they regard as the mischievous revolution of the sixteenth century, their efforts provoke no deep and general hostility. Their energy and zeal are spoken of with admiration in newspapers; their characteristic doctrines and practices, if condemned at all, are condemned faintly and with hesitation, even by the bishops of what we used to call a Protestant Church. Pleasant music and fervent preaching will draw crowded congregations to churches in which the great articles of the Protestant faith are vehemently assaulted and the Roman creed as vehemently maintained. The whole tone of our popular literature, the spirit of popular assemblies,

and the current conversation of society, indicate that hostility to Rome is rapidly passing away, and that in many quarters it has already quite disappeared.

If I were a politician, and nothing more, this singular change in the spirit of the nation would awaken my deep concern. It is true, that the foundations of English greatness were laid long before the Reformation, and that in the early periods of our history the bishops of the Roman Church resisted the tyranny of kings, and encouraged the nobles and the people to contend for the authority of law. But the true glory of the nation began with its great controversy with Rome. It was during that protracted struggle that the genius of our ancestors revealed for the first time all its splendour, and that the English nation gave to Europe the first decisive proof of its heroic temper. Three periods in our history are for ever memorable—the reign of Elizabeth,

the Commonwealth, the Revolution of 1688; and in every one of these the fiery hatred of the English people for Rome was at white heat. Our Protestantism has become one of the chief bonds of our national unity; the achievements of our ancestors in the Protestant cause have been cherished among our most glorious national traditions. Shakspere is Protestant through and through. Milton was not only a Protestant but a Puritan. Our most famous statesmen were statesmen who counted it their chief business to maintain the Protestant interest. The sovereigns whose names are on the lips of the common people and whose reigns we regard with the greatest pride, Elizabeth, Cromwell, William III., are all identified with the triumphs of Protestantism. If England ceases to be Protestant, the change must affect the chief monuments of our national literature; we shall have to re-write our national history; and to break with our national traditions. The

change involves a revolution in our whole national life which must have far graver issues than any change in the mere form of our constitution. Under a monarchy and under a republic the spirit and manners of a people may remain the same; but let Protestantism lose its hold on this country, and the old life of the nation, which for three centuries has manifested itself in such energetic and noble forms, has created the virtues which constitute the strength and stability of the English character, has inspired our intellectual triumphs, has built up our material prosperity, has made our reverence for the authority of law a principle and a habit, and our love for political freedom a passion, has given to our arms imperishable renown, and placed at our feet a wider and a prouder empire than ancient Rome ever governed;—this life, so rich, so deep, so robust, will pass for ever away. Let the nation cease to be Protestant, and the England

which, notwithstanding her faults, we have so passionately admired, will cease to exist; she will pass through a transformation so deep and fundamental that as an Englishman I cannot contemplate it without perplexity and dismay. What she may *become* I cannot tell; but what she *has* been during the splendid years of her loyalty to Protestantism I know; and God forbid that her magnificent history should suddenly come to a close.

But as a Christian man I look upon this change in the national mind with still deeper concern. The controversy between Romanism and Protestantism is not a controversy on the mere details of a creed, on the mere circumstances of worship, or on the mere mechanism of ecclesiastical polity. There is one great and vital principle which underlies all the external differences between these two systems. In the theology of Rome, in her discipline of the moral and spiritual life, in her ecclesiastical

polity, in the forms of her worship, this principle is systematically violated. I do not propose to develop in detail the proof of this position. I shall be satisfied if I can make clear to my readers what appears to me to be the ultimate principle of Protestantism, and if I can disentangle it from some misconceptions.

The Ultimate Principle of Protestantism,—what is it?

Ask this question of the first half-dozen men you happen to meet, and five out of the six will probably reply, *the right of private judgment.* You will get the same answer from most popular books which refer incidentally to the history and results of the Protestant Reformation. Some Roman Catholic writers will tell you the same.

Ask the same question of men who have given some attention to theological controversy, and most of them, speaking in the

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sense of Chillingworth's famous sentence, "The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants," will tell you that the characteristic and fundamental principle of Protestantism is the assertion of *the sole or supreme authority of Holy Scripture as the rule of religious faith and practice.* The Protestant theologians of Germany, many of them at least, will give you a fuller answer; they will say that the formal principle of Protestantism consists in the assertion of the sole or supreme authority of Holy Scripture, and its material principle in the doctrine of *Justification by Faith.*

We might get other accounts of the principle which is supposed to be the very root of Protestantism; but these three—the Right of Private Judgment, the Sole or Supreme Authority of Holy Scripture, the doctrine of Justification by Faith, are sufficient for my immediate purpose. They contain, between

them, a tolerably full and fair account of the characteristic position and faith of the Protestant Churches.

The first two principles,—the Right of Private Judgment and the Authority of Holy Scripture,—do not form, or do not seem to form, any part of the actual contents of Protestant theology. In asserting the Authority of Holy Scripture, Protestantism declares whence we are to obtain the evidence of the truth of any doctrine, or the obligation of any duty; in asserting the Right of Private Judgment, Protestantism declares who is to judge of the evidence; and it is perfectly conceivable that two men who begin by accepting these principles may soon arrive at very different conclusions, and construct two very different theological systems.

The doctrine of Justification by Faith, on the other hand, which some of the Germans call the material principle of Protestantism,

supposes that the Right of Private Judgment has been exercised, and the Authority of Holy Scripture consulted, and one of the gravest of all theological questions actually solved.

But one great Idea controls and inspires the whole Protestant movement, and I propose in these pages to show how this Idea illustrates the precise sense in which Protestantism asserts the Right of Private Judgment, maintains the Authority of Holy Scripture, and teaches that men are justified by Faith.

I do not mean to imply that Protestant Churches and Theologians have distinctly apprehended this Idea, or that you will find it articulately developed in Protestant systems of Theology and categorically affirmed in Protestant Confessions, or that the teaching of great Protestant authorities has never contradicted it. The Reformation was a greater

work than the Reformers themselves knew, as every divine work transcends the thought of the human agents by whom it is accomplished. What I hope to prove is, that one great principle gives to the Protestant controversy unity, dignity, and enduring spiritual significance.

THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

I.

The Right of Private Judgment.

THE Right of Private Judgment,—this has been one of the battle cries of the Protestant Churches:—what does it mean?

As sometimes interpreted, no claim can be more preposterous. There are very many persons who are always saying, "Thought should be free. To think as we like is one of the fundamental rights of man. All restraints on freedom of belief are but relics of dark and superstitious days which have now for ever passed away. It is the curse of all the Churches, Protestant and Catholic alike, that they refuse us the right to think as we please."

If declamation of this kind is intended to be

simply a protest against inflicting human pains and penalties on men for their honest convictions, against the attempt on the part of human governments to enforce the acceptance of a creed and to limit the freedom of discussion, I will unite in it as heartily as any man. But the claim to freedom of thought on all questions relating to Religion, is sometimes asserted in a form which passes far beyond a mere protest against the encroachments of human authority on the province of religious conviction. You might almost suppose that those who indulge in it intended to favour a recommendation with regard to religious belief that I read the other day, and which ran in these words:—"Whatever you believe, if you believe anything, you should at all events believe nothing that was ever believed by anybody else," and even this advice hardly represents the temper which is sometimes manifested by very "advanced" thinkers, and

it is necessary to add, "as soon as anybody else believes the same thing as yourself, take care to believe something different." Very much, indeed, of the talk on this subject is absolutely frivolous. There is no real thought behind it. It means nothing. When it does mean something, its meaning is often most pernicious and absurd. But there are men who confuse this supposed right of thinking as they please on religious questions, with the Right of Private Judgment. Now I deny that any man has a right to think as he pleases, either about Religion or about any other subject of speculation and inquiry.

It is the great distinction of modern science that men have given up the freedom to think of the universe as they please. All its triumphs have come from renouncing that false and monstrous pretension. There was a time when men made schemes of the material universe out of

their own heads, very much as some men now-a-days make schemes of the spiritual universe. They *fancied* a universe for themselves, and worked out their fancies with most elaborate ingenuity. They thought for instance that a circle was the most perfect figure, and therefore they maintained that the planets must move in a circle. They constructed theories of the origin of all things, some insisting that fire is the ultimate principle, some asserting that honour for air, and some for water.

Even in the earliest times, indeed, men felt that some regard must be had for facts, and a true science has only been developed as men have been controlled by the conviction that on all scientific questions, instead of thinking as they please, their thoughts must be constantly limited and governed by the facts. No human authority has a right to restrain them, but the authority of the facts is absolute. The liberty of speculation is sternly restrained. There are

boundaries which it must not pass. As soon as a man begins to think as he pleases about the distance of the earth from the sun, or about the masses of the planets, or about the elements into which a compound chemical substance can be resolved, or about the structure of any plant or any animal, he loses all claim to be regarded as a reasonable person.

No true man of science asks for liberty to think as he likes, or to believe as he likes. The one merit of every scientific theory consists in this, that it is rigorously subjected to the authority of facts.

Consider how this claim to think as we please would work in another direction.

Suppose a man were to commence his historical studies by informing us that he had a right to think as he pleased, and that he recognized no "authorities,"—what kind of confidence should we repose in the result of his investigations?

It is a long time since I thought anything about the controversies on the early history of Rome; but in my early days there was a general disposition to regard a great part of Livy as mere fiction; he was set aside because he was believed to have hardly any authority at all. But suppose a man were to say that he would utterly disregard the speeches of Cicero, and Cæsar's Commentaries, and Tacitus, and Suetonius, and all ancient Roman monuments and inscriptions, and write a history of the empire on the principle of Freedom of Thought; or suppose he were to attempt a history of Greece, with a similar resolution to set aside Thucydides, and the coins and inscriptions of ancient Greece,—what kind of a history would be the result of his labours? The business of a true historian is to discover *authorities* on which he can rely, and to form his conception of history by them. He must not claim the right to think as he likes, and to

believe as he likes: he must do precisely what the scientific man does in another sphere: he must conform his thinking and his belief to the facts.

Now, in the region of religious truth there are also restraints on the liberty of speculation. A man may determine that he will construct out of his own head a theory of the universe which shall be in harmony with his own feelings and preferences; he may protest against all restrictions on his liberty of thought; he may build up a theory of religion for himself, just as the old philosophers built up for themselves a theory of the material universe, and he may make it, as he thinks, very grand, very noble, and very lovely. No human authority has a right to punish him for it; but if he thinks that, in constructing a belief of this sort, he is exercising what Protestantism means by the Right of Private Judgment, I venture to tell him that he is

altogether mistaken; and if he claims my intellectual respect or my moral respect for the result of his speculations, I am obliged to refuse it.

Exercise your right of Private Judgment in matters of Religion, and I will honour you from my heart, whatever may be the conclusions at which you may arrive; but if on those great and awful questions involved in the relations of God to the universe, and the duty and destiny of man, you exercise, not your Private *Judgment*, but your private *Fancy*, you are guilty of the most frivolous trifling, where trifling is not only a folly but a crime.

There is an ambiguity in the phrase, Freedom of Thought, by which many persons are misled. Strictly speaking, thought is free only in those directions in which we are ignorant. I know nothing about the possible inhabitants of the planet Jupiter; I may, if I please, fancy that Jupiter is inhabited, and I am free

to give its inhabitants what forms I please and what occupations I please. I may think of them as feeding on air or on water; I may think of them as quadrupeds or bipeds; as winged creatures or as creeping things. But I am not free to think as I please of the inhabitants of Paris, of Vienna, or of Rome. Where knowledge begins, freedom of thought, in the sense in which the phrase is sometimes used, ceases. It is while the scientific man has no facts to determine unresolved questions that his speculation is unrestricted; till the decisive facts are known he is at liberty to construct one hypothesis after another to account for the phenomena which he is investigating; and it is while the historian has no trustworthy testimony that he is at liberty to speculate on the secret action taken by great men in relation to important public events. But both the scientific man and the historian welcome the arrest of their liberty.

They rejoice when the fact or the testimony is discovered that regulates and controls their thought. We ought to be equally grateful when in the region of religious truth speculation ends and knowledge begins.

Sometimes the Right of Private Judgment is spoken of as though it were the great sanction of universal scepticism, and meant nothing more than the Right to Doubt. If that were a true representation of what is commonly held to be the fundamental principle of Protestantism, then Protestantism and Christianity would be in irreconcilable antagonism; for Christianity insists on faith as the supreme duty of man, the condition of restoration to God and of all moral and spiritual perfection in this world, and of eternal blessedness in the world to come. But the Reformers never intended to maintain the Right to Doubt. To doubt is to be ignorant, and ignorance is to be deplored as a calamity, not defended as a right. There

are many questions indeed on which no wise man can arrive at any certainty; the materials for solving them are not within our reach. There are some questions on which it is the misfortune of some men to remain in invincible doubt after everybody else has seen adequate reasons for reaching definite conclusions. But on all questions which gravely affect our duty either to God or man, the same obligations that require us to discharge our duty when it is known, require us to arrive at clear and definite results, whenever such results are accessible to us. We have no right to remain ignorant of duties which we might discover by a strenuous and laborious effort to discover them, and, therefore, we have no right to remain in doubt about great facts by which our duty is determined, when it is possible to discover whether the facts are sustained by adequate evidence. The Right of Private Judgment is not the right to form no judg-

ment at all on matters of transcendent practical importance. If it were it would be an apology for intellectual indolence, and for moral cowardice.

What then is the real nature of the Right of Private Judgment, and on what does the Right rest? It has been justly said, that every Right worth contending for is only the guarantee of a Duty; and of no Right that men have ever claimed is the saying more true than of this. Protestantism affirms and defends the Right of Private Judgment in matters of Religion on religious grounds, and because the Right is necessary to the discharge of a great religious duty. God has revealed Himself to our race in many forms; His supreme revelation is contained in the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the great controversies between Protestantism and Romanism turns on the point whether that revelation is indeed

and of a truth a revelation to the human race or not. May I, for myself, see God manifest in the flesh? When He speaks does He speak to *me?* When He gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb; when the withered arm becomes strong at His word; when the hot brow of fever becomes cool at His touch; when He calls the dead back to life again,—may *I* stand by, and see with my own eyes the wonderful manifestations of His mercy and His power? When He discourses to Nicodemus about the new birth, may *I* listen? When He delivers the sermon on the Mount, may *I* push in among the crowd and hear Him for myself? When He speaks about the lost sheep, and the lost piece of silver, and the Prodigal Son, —may *I*, a lost and sinful man, listen to Him, and from His own words receive hope and comfort and eternal life? May I stand and watch Him while He breaks the bread in the upper

chamber at Jerusalem? May I, for myself, hear Him say, when He takes the cup:—"This is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sin?" May I follow Him, even though it be afar off, as He passes from the Judgment Hall to Calvary?

He loves me with so great a love that to rescue me from sin and from the pains of eternal death His hands are pierced with nails, His head is crowned with thorns, His soul is oppressed with an awful desolation, and He cries, "My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" May I stand there, while He hangs on the cross, and watch Him in the sufferings which He endures for my salvation, and may this transcendent expression of infinite love act directly on my conscience, my intellect, and my heart?

May I? I must. The appeal which God makes is to me—directly to me; and if priests, or bishops, or synods, or councils, or popes,

are guilty of thrusting themselves between me and my God, I revolt against their blasphemous pretensions. In Christ, God speaks to *me;* for myself I must listen to Him. To listen to *them* instead of to *Him* is a crime,—a crime which His Majesty must avenge, and which may change His very love into fiery indignation. If I stand alone, with all Christendom against me, I will receive at first hand the glorious revelation of the infinite love of God.

The defence of this supreme duty is what Protestantism means when it vindicates the Right of Private Judgment. The revelation which God has made in Christ of His innermost thought and deepest life, of His Justice, His Holiness, His Compassion, and His Grace, is a revelation to all mankind; and Protestantism affirms that when God reveals Himself to every man, it is the duty of every man to receive the revelation as God gives it.

But it may be said that there are parts of

this revelation which are hard to be understood ; that even honest men may be betrayed into grievous errors ; and that some permanent and living organ of the divine thought and will is necessary in order that we may be protected from mistake. Our Lord Himself has anticipated this difficulty. Among the Jewish people there were religious teachers who, on the ground of their superior knowledge of the ancient Scriptures and of the traditions by which the Scriptures were supplemented, asserted authority over the common people. They regarded the unlearned with contempt—"This people that knoweth not the law are cursed." Their knowledge was of a kind which could be acquired only by men who could devote many years to the study of it, and who could attend the great rabbinical schools. It was beyond the reach of the great mass of the nation, and those who had it, claimed the reverence and the implicit submission of the

unlearned. Christ taught His disciples that it was not to be so among them. "Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Teacher, and all ye are brethren."

There might be differences in the extent of their knowledge of religious truth. More was revealed to apostles than to the ordinary members of the Churches which they established. Among the apostles themselves there were similar inequalities. St. Paul and St. John had a knowledge of the truths and principles of the Christian faith far larger than that which appears in the writings of St. Peter; and St. Peter probably knew much more than some of his apostolic brethren. The same differences have continued among Christian men ever since. In the early centuries, Athanasius, Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory, were doctors of the Church. In the middle ages the same great distinction belonged to Anselm and to Aquinas. Later

still, in the times of the Reformation, it was the large knowledge as well as the intense zeal of Luther and Calvin which enabled them to render such illustrious service to the Church. In every age and under all circumstances there must be some members of the Church whose acquaintance with Divine truth is deeper and richer than that possessed by most of their brethren. These inequalities arise from differences of natural power; from the greater leisure which is given to some men for meditation, for study, and for prayer; and from the larger measure of the special illumination of the Holy Ghost which is conferred on some elect saints. These differences partly determined the organization of the Church in apostolic times, and should partly determine it still.

But as soon as there is any pretension to *exclusive* knowledge on the part of any Christian man or any class of Christian men, any claim

to speak to the Church with an authority requiring implicit faith and obedience, the pretension must be resisted, the claims must be trampled under foot. There are many Christian men who are holier than I am and wiser than I am; but if they assert authority over my faith, I resent the claim. To all their pretensions I reply, *One* is our *Teacher:* you may have been a better scholar than I have been; you may have more native power; you may have been more diligent; you may have made greater progress because you have been more saintly and devout; but we sit on the same form, and we belong to the same class, though you may be at the top and I at the bottom. *One* is our Teacher, and if you claim to be anything more than a scholar like myself, I am bound to protest and to refuse submission. If you have a brotherly spirit, you will share with me your larger knowledge, and will assist me in master-

ing difficulties which I have never been able to master for myself, and I shall be grateful. I gladly recognise and willingly reverence your superior attainments. I confess my own inferiority, and shall be thankful for your help; but if you leave the form where we sit side by side, and get a desk of your own, and claim to be a teacher yourself, and to speak with authority, then I decline to follow you. I remain in the class under the great Teacher of us all, who, according to Christ's promise, will lead us into all the truth.

Protestantism affirms that the illumination of the Holy Ghost is granted, not merely to priests, or to bishops, or to councils, but to all Christian men. We are all taught of God. It was to ordinary Christian people that St. John was writing when he said, "We have an unction from above, and know all things."

First of all, the external revelation which God has made in Christ is a revelation to all

men; and secondly, the inner light of the Spirit, by which the soul is made capable of receiving and apprehending that revelation, is given to all Christians.

In Auguste Comte's remarkable discussion of the influence of the Church of Rome on the intellectual life of Christendom, he observes that the Church rendered one great service to what he regards as the healthy development of European thought,—it restricted the limits of inspiration. The founder of the Positive Philosophy saw very clearly that according to the original idea of the Christian faith, the supernatural illumination of the Holy Spirit is the prerogative of every man that believes in Christ. He regarded as visionary the noble faith that there is a living God, the Fountain of life and light, in whom His creatures may find strength and wisdom and blessedness. He supposed that the intellectual progress of the race was impeded

so long as men imagined that any knowledge of regions of truth lying beyond the province of science was possible to them—knowledge derived from the immediate illumination of the Spirit of God; and since the Church of Rome created an elaborate system, by which the sphere of supernatural illumination was gradually brought within narrower and still narrower limits, until at last it was practically limited to the Pope, he believed that the Church contributed to the emancipation of the intellect of Europe from a mischievous superstition. We Protestants, on the other hand, re-assert the ancient rights of the commonalty of the Christian Church. We reclaim the prerogatives which the Bishop of Rome has usurped.

The right of private judgment for which Protestantism contends, is neither the right to doubt, nor the right to "think as we please." It is the right to listen to God when God

speaks to us, and the right to receive that direct teaching of the Spirit of God which is one of the noblest prerogatives that Christ confers upon all who believe in Him.

No such spiritual illumination, indeed, is granted to any man as that which is implied in the vast pretensions which are asserted for the Pope by the Vatican Council, but to every devout soul there comes light from the upper Heaven. The Spirit of Truth is near to us all, to guide us into all the truth, and when we vindicate the right of private judgment, we are but insisting on the duty and the privilege of every Christian soul to receive the teaching of the Spirit of God. The revelation which God has made to our race is a revelation to every man, and every man may receive the illumination of the Spirit, to enable him to apprehend its meaning. When God speaks to me through Christ, no ecclesiastical authority has a right to come between God and my

soul. When the light of God is shining upon me direct from heaven, I am under the most solemn and awful obligations to walk in it. This is what we are pleading for in the Right of Private Judgment. It is the most sacred of Rights because it guarantees the most sacred of Duties.

THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

II.

The Authority of Holy Scripture.

I MAY be told that in protesting against the intervention of any inferior authority between the soul and God, I am destroying the second great principle of Protestantism—the sole or supreme authority of Holy Scripture as the Rule of Christian faith and practice. Romanism, it may be urged, puts the Church, the decrees of Councils, the infallibility of the Pope, between the soul and God, and Protestantism puts a book between the soul and God; and it may be argued that in neither case is man left alone in the immediate presence of Him "in whom we live and move and have our being."

The objection is plausible. It derives considerable strength from the manner in which many Protestant theologians have dealt with Holy Scripture. When the mighty spiritual impulse which originated the Reformation had begun to spend itself, there was a disposition on the part of the great dogmatic writers who built up and organized the structure of Protestant theology to place the infallible book in precisely the same position in which Rome had placed the infallible Church. From this error have come some of the most serious religious perils through which Protestant nations have passed, perils which still awaken the keen anxiety of all who are loyal to the truth of Christ. The error was a very natural one: it was almost inevitable. I cannot discuss fully the complicated questions which are involved in this part of my subject; I must be content to state the case in mere outline.

Remember the exact nature of the objection under discussion. I have contended that the Right of Private Judgment really asserts that no authority ought to come between the soul and God. It is objected, that while we have got rid of an infallible Church or an infallible Pope, we retain an infallible Book, and that we are guilty therefore of violating our fundamental principle.

For the sake of reducing the discussion within necessary limits, I will consider the objection in relation to the New Testament alone. The New Testament is to us by far the most important part of the Bible; and substantially the same considerations which show that the objection is untenable in relation to the New Testament, will also show that it is untenable in relation to the Old Testament; but in relation to the Old Testament the discussion in detail would be more intricate.

First of all, I think that there is a prac-

tical answer to the objection. When I read the Syllabus issued a few years ago by the Pope, or the Decrees of any of the great Councils, I am conscious, all the time, of the presence of an external authority that is claiming my submission. The validity of the claim is a question which is constantly emerging: I must settle that question or everything remains doubtful. What I am required to believe, I am required to believe because the Council or the Pope affirms it. I am never left alone with God.

I think that the universal experience of devout Christians will sustain me, when I say that in reading the New Testament the idea of the authority of the book, as a book, is hardly ever thought of. The book—explain it how we may—vanishes. The truth I read there, shines in its own light. I forget Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John. I see Christ face to face; I hear His

voice; I am filled with wonder and joy. I forget St. Paul, and am thrilled with gratitude for the infinite mercy which justifies me freely for Christ's sake, and for His sake grants me the free gift of eternal life. I forget St. James, and think only of the authority of the divine law. I forget St. John in the vision of the divine love. The infallibility of the Council, or of the Pope, recurs to me constantly when I am considering their definitions of truth; it comes between me and the truth itself. Whether the writers of the New Testament are infallible or not, is a question which rarely occurs to me. Somehow, when they tell me a truth, I come to know it for myself; the truth is mine and not merely theirs. Practically, the Bible does not come between me and God.

And now let us try to discover the explanation of this.

The New Testament begins with the earthly

life of our Lord Jesus Christ four times repeated. The story is told in a very wonderful way—in a way that I hardly know how to describe except by saying that the story seems to tell itself. The personality of the four biographers hardly ever appears. There is scarcely anything to remind us of them. There is neither criticism nor eulogy. Only in one or two instances is there anything that can be called a comment on what our Lord said or what He did. If for a moment it occurs to us that even apart from comment and criticism the story of a life must be coloured by the feeling and faith of the writer, all distrust disappears when we look at the wonderful portrait which every one of the evangelists presents.

If we had been living in the Holy Land during Christ's earthly ministry, to have listened to *Him* would have been to listen to God Himself, for He was God manifest

in the flesh. He Himself said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Now I cannot tell how it may be with others, but to me, when I read the gospels, the eighteen centuries which lie between ourselves and the earthly life of our Lord sometimes seem to vanish away. I can hardly claim the blessedness which He pronounced on those that have not seen Him and yet have believed. I walk with Him through the corn-fields; I stand on the shore of the sea of Galilee while He teaches the people from the boat; by the side of the woman of Samaria, I listen with wonder to the words of the Stranger at the well; I hear Him cry in the Temple, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" I see Him after a weary day in Jerusalem, passing over the limestone ridge of the Mount of Olives into the peace and stillness of the corn-fields and olive-trees which lie round the village of Bethany; and

as the twilight is deepening around Him I follow Him into the house of Mary and Martha. I listen to Him in Gethsemane; I see Him crucified between the two thieves; I go with the women to the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection; with the disciples I gaze upon Him as He ascends into heaven. The infallible book come between me and Christ! I never think of the book; I fall at His feet, and exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God!"

Let us pass to the Epistles. Here, it may be urged, I am on different ground. The Pope claims to be the successor of the chief of the Apostles; and it may be maintained that the fundamental principle of Protestantism is violated just as fatally by the authority with which Protestants invest the Epistles of St. Peter, contained in the New Testament, as by the authority with which Romanists invest the rescripts of the Pope, whom they

regard as the successor of St. Peter. In both cases, it may be affirmed that a human presence comes between the soul and God—the only difference being, that St. Peter is dead and the Pope still living. As I have said before, the argument is a very plausible one to look at, but it falls to pieces as soon as you touch it.

Read the epistles of the New Testament, take what is in some respects the most remarkable of them all—the Epistle to the Romans. To me it seems to matter very little, what measure of *authority* you ascribe to it. The force of the Epistle depends very little, if at all, upon the personal claims of the writer. He first illustrates, in a wonderful manner, the gross superstitions and grosser vices of the heathen world. These superstitions and vices are notorious. Every one knows about them. The natural reason and conscience of mankind condemn them. He then reminds

the Jews, that the condemnation which they pronounced on the sins of the Gentiles, only aggravates their own guilt in committing the same transgressions; and that a man who does wrong is no better off, but only the worse off, for having a clear knowledge of what is right. In affirming these principles he still appeals to the natural reason and conscience of men. The heathen are sinful, and the clearer knowledge of the Jews does not excuse the sins of which the Jews are guilty. The sacred books to which the Jews appealed as the glory of their race, condemned in language of terrible severity the sins which Jews themselves committed. The whole world, therefore, is guilty before God. Up to this point, there is no question of apostolic authority, and there is nothing to come between me and the very truth of God.

St. Paul then declares that God meets us in our sin and peril, provides for us a pro-

pitiation for sin, and offers us, for Christ's sake, remission of sins. There is a sense in which, no doubt, I am required to accept these statements, on apostolic testimony; but what the Apostle tells me, Christ Himself has told me already. St. Paul does but remind me of what I have already heard from the lips of God manifest in the flesh: moreover, what the Apostle tells me, is confirmed by the testimony of millions upon millions of Christian people who have trusted in God for salvation through Christ, and who declare that He has saved them. What is still more important is, that if I trust in God to save me for Christ's sake, I can at once dispense with all testimony, for I, too, become conscious that I have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; and I am conscious that I have immediate access to God in response to my faith. My hope of the Divine glory is not built merely on the foundation of apostolic

declarations and promises, but on my personal consciousness that God has come to me, has shed abroad His love in my heart, as the light and heat of the sun are shed abroad through the heavens and the earth at mid-day. Conscious of being justified through Christ, I can infer for myself that I shall be ultimately saved by Him. What the Apostle writes, becomes true to me, as I dwell upon it: I know for myself, that he is uttering the thought of God.

Let me state the principle under another form.

There is a difference between the first four books of the New Testament and the rest. The first four, in which we come face to face with Christ, and see the works and listen to the words of the Son of God, bear a noble name, given to them by a true instinct of the Christian Church. They are the four *Gospels*. They constitute the substance of the message,

the good news, to be delivered to all mankind. The Epistles are addressed to Christian Churches, to Societies composed of persons who have already received the good news, and who have been restored to God in response to their faith in Christ; and the teaching peculiar to the Epistles, with some possible exceptions, on which in the general argument I cannot dwell, is verified point by point in the spiritual consciousness of all who have received Christ; so that the question of their *authority*, and of the measure of inspiration granted to their writers, although of great speculative interest, is of secondary practical importance.

To put the whole case, for the sake of clearness, in a somewhat exaggerated form: when I read the *Gospels*, I think nothing of the authority of the book which contains them, for the glory of God revealed in Christ shines directly upon me; and when, having received

Christ, I read the Epistles, I think nothing of the authority of the writers, for I myself know that what they say is true.

No doubt theological writers have often been mistaken in their treatment of the Holy Scriptures, and have really put these sacred books between the soul and God,—contending, first, for the authority of the books on purely external grounds, and then requiring us to receive their contents. That was not the method of the original leaders of the Protestant Reformation. I am glad to be able to support this statement by the authority of one of the most illustrious of the evangelical theologians of Germany now living—Dr. Dorner.

In his "History of Protestant Theology" there are two very remarkable passages. He says,—

"The apostolic and prophetic writings only came to be regarded by Luther as the decisive rule and judge, *after* the saving matter, which the Church still had in common

with the Scriptures, had approved itself to his heart by its own inherent power. Before the decisive turning-point of his life, the Scriptures only influenced him as *a means of grace* similar to preaching, but not as a *rule* recognised by him as independent." *

Again,—"It is clear that for Luther the great original certainty which attests all other truths, as it is not the authority of the Church, so also it is not the authority of the canon of the Holy Scriptures handed down by the Church. It is rather the *subject-matter of the Word of God*, which, however different may be its forms of expression, is able to attest itself to the hearts of men as the Word of God by itself and its divine power." †

I need hardly remind you of one striking illustration of the truth of this. For some

* Dorner's "History of Protestant Theology," vol. i., p. 221.

† Ibid., vol. i., p. 231.

time Luther rejected the Epistle of St. James. Why did he reject it? Because it seemed to him that the Epistle was antagonistic to the great truth that we are justified by Faith, and not by works. That he was justified by Faith, Luther knew;—he knew it for himself;—it was impossible for him to doubt it. He had cast himself, with all his sins, on the infinite mercy of God revealed through Christ; and he was conscious that God had received him, and that the light of God's presence was shining round about him. Of two things he was certain—that he was a sinful man with nothing in him on the ground of which it was possible for God to justify him, and that he had been justified by God's free grace. If an angel, if a legion of angels with all their glory about them, had come to tell Luther that works were necessary before he could be justified, he would have protested against *them* just as firmly and vehemently

as he protested against the Pope. He had no "works," and yet he was justified. And when a letter, which claimed to be apostolic, appeared to him to teach that without works justification is impossible, he threw the letter aside. He knew better. Without works he himself had been justified.

To put the whole case once more as briefly as possible: Protestantism, according to its fundamental principle, does not accept the truth of the *teaching* of Holy Scripture merely because it acknowledges the *authority* of Holy Scripture; it would be more accurate to say that it acknowledges the authority of Holy Scripture, because it accepts the truth of its teaching.

Hence it was not in the earlier days of Protestantism that Protestant theologians wrote treatises on the external evidences of Christianity and on the historical proofs of the certainty of the Christian revelation. I do not mean

to undervalue such treatises; they fill an important place in the controversy with unbelief; but when John Owen, the great Puritan, defended the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures, it was his object to demonstrate that the Bible depended on no external aids and supports for its supreme place in the religious thought of mankind, but possesses, to quote the forcible words of Dr. Chalmers, in describing Owen's treatise, "a self-evidencing light and power for manifesting its own divine original, superior to the testimony of eye-witnesses, or the evidence of miracles, or those supernatural gifts with which the first teachers of Christianity were endowed for accrediting their divine mission." *

There have been millions of Christian people who have known for themselves the truth of the revelation recorded in Holy Scripture, but who would have been altogether unable to

* See Note A.

give any reason for acknowledging the authority of the book itself. And if for a moment I may turn aside from my immediate subject, I should like to express my strong conviction that we commit a very serious error in supposing that in our great controversy with unbelief it is our first business to demonstrate to those who reject the Christian Faith, the authority of the books in which it is recorded. The authority of the books of the New Testament is a question to be determined, not before we have received the Christian Faith, but afterwards ; and even then the question of their *authority* has a theological rather than a practical interest. Men are not unbelievers in the great truths contained in the Bible because they reject the authority of the Bible ; they reject its authority because they disbelieve the truths. They do not believe that sin is so great and appalling an evil that it can be justly punished with terrible suffer-

ing and shame, and with the eternal death with which impenitent men are threatened in the New Testament; they have no such sense of desolation arising from a consciousness that they are far away from God as makes them long for God to come near to our race as He has actually come in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord; they denounce the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and reject the doctrine of the New Birth, because they have never discovered their utter moral helplessness, their inability to begin to live a really good life until God has first of all forgiven their sins, taken sides with them against their sins, and granted them the new and supernatural life which comes from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. They deny the *authority* of the Bible, not because they have investigated the external evidences that it contains a divine revelation, and have discovered that those evidences are unsatisfactory, but because the teaching of

the Bible is offensive to them. It may seem paradoxical, but I believe it is substantially the truth, that men first believe in the contents of Holy Scripture and then confess its authority.

I appeal once more to the experience of all devout Christians. We have never found that this great Book—which indeed is a library rather than a book—comes between us and God. To treat it as an external rule, is to misunderstand its purpose and to do violence to its character. Young people may, perhaps, feel dissatisfied with it, precisely because it has not assumed the form of a definite code for the regulation of human life, an elaborate creed for the regulation of human faith. I remember that in my earlier years I felt dissatisfaction of this kind myself. It seemed to me that the Bible would have more perfectly met my necessities if it had contained an organized system of moral laws, authoritatively deter-

mining my duty in all the varying circumstances of human life, leaving nothing doubtful, and resolving all practical difficulties by a definite commandment invested with the authority of God. In the course of my ministry I have again and again met with Christian men who have had the same feeling. They would have liked to have had their duty defined for them in the Bible with all the exactness and rigour of an Act of Parliament. Had God given us a Bible of that sort, the position assigned to it by Protestantism would no doubt have placed a book between the soul and God.

But the Bible is altogether unlike an Act of Parliament. "The entrance of Thy words,"—this was the testimony of an ancient saint,—"giveth light." This is the function which the Holy Scriptures were intended to perform. By poetry and prophecy, by the story of the sins and sufferings as well as of the holiness and joy of good men, and, above

all, by the transcendent grace and gentleness and majesty of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself,—God manifest in the flesh,—the conscience receives that light from the upper heaven, in which it discerns for itself the will of God. We are not asked to put our hand into the hand of any authoritative guide, and to walk blindfold. We are "*taught* of God," and do not merely receive commandments from Him, which have no authority for us apart from an external demonstration that they are His. In God's light we see light.

What is true in relation to duty is true in relation to belief. One of the grounds on which Romanists rest the necessity of the decrees of Councils and Popes to define the creed of the Church, is precisely the absence of such authoritative definitions in Holy Scripture as they affirm to be essential to the truth and stability of the creed of Christendom. They insist that the contents of the Bible prove that

it was never meant to be a Rule of Faith in the sense in which the canons of a Council are meant to be a Rule of Faith. We agree with them. The Bible was *not* intended to take the place which they assign to the authoritative creeds and definitions and decrees of Councils and Popes; and to those who use it wisely, it can never become what we say that these creeds and definitions and decrees must be, by their very nature, their form, and their design. The Bible was meant, not to give us a theology ready-made, in which we might have been able to rest as a complete system of faith, but "to make us wise unto salvation," opening our vision, filling the soul with light, revealing God, and leaving us to construct a theology for ourselves.

This wonderful work the Holy Scriptures actually accomplish. To investigate the historical evidence that the original writers claim our confidence as men filled with the Holy Ghost,

is an interesting and necessary part of Christian learning; but the authority of the Book, its supreme place in the thought of the Church, has long ago become almost independent of evidence of that kind.

I do not very much care to dig into the mounds which cover the wealth and splendour of ancient cities, or to re-investigate the fragmentary remains of ancient literature in order to discover fresh evidence of the trustworthiness of Holy Scripture. The proof of the divine origin of the religious contents of these sacred books lies nearer at hand, and is accessible to the ignorant as well as to scholars. In every heart that is won from the love of sin to the love of God, that is consoled in sorrow and strengthened in the presence of temptation, by the writings of Psalmists, Prophets, and Apostles, I find evidence that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." If through

their writings I find my way to God, what further proof do I need that they were taught by God by Himself in order that I too might come to know Him whom to know is eternal life?

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, He filled the sun with heat and light. I am thankful for the wonderful history of creation contained in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, if indeed it be not a psalm rather than a history; but I do not need the authority of Moses to assure me that the splendour of the sun was kindled by the Divine hand. Its glory is the sufficient evidence of its origin; and as it shines on, giving life and light to the world through one century after another, the demonstration of the majesty and power of its Creator becomes more and more wonderful. And so, through many centuries, in many lands, among different races, in nations varying in their traditions,

their laws, and their civilization, wherever the Holy Scriptures have been freely read, whether by learned or by uncultivated men, by the rich or by the poor, by laymen or by priests, they have drawn innumerable hearts to God, they have filled the soul with a light which, wherever it is received, is known to be Divine. They have given to the troubled a peace which the world cannot give; they have purified the vision of conscience, and strengthened its control over the inferior passions of our nature; they have inspired faltering faith in the Divine love with firmness and vigour; they have changed cowards into heroes, and sinners into saints. The proof of their Divine origin does not become weaker as the times in which they were written recede farther and still farther into the past; every new generation bears fresh and independent testimony to their unique glory and power; the evidence that they contain the very Word of God is

perpetually becoming richer and more varied. The reason of this lies in the fact, which Romanists forget when they tell us that we put a book between the soul and God,—the book is so written, explain it how you will, that those who read it devoutly, forget the book and rejoice in the open vision of God.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

III.

Justification by Faith.

THE direct access of the soul to God—the direct access of God to the soul—this is the ultimate principle of Protestantism. The whole controversy between ourselves and Rome turns on whether the intercourse between God and man is direct and immediate, or whether between Him and us there are priests, and saints, and the decrees of Councils, and the authority of Popes.

It is this which invests with such transcendent importance the controversy concerning Justification. Luther was right in speaking of the doctrine of Justification by Faith as the crucial doctrine, the real test of the fidelity

of a Church to the Gospel of Christ; by accepting or rejecting it a Church stands or falls. Theologians are right in treating it as the characteristic doctrine of Protestantism. The deepest question in controversy between ourselves and Rome,—between ourselves and all those who are drifting towards Rome, and trying to carry the nation with them,—lies here. Those who refuse to be called Protestants, denounce this doctrine. Yes, clergymen of the Anglican Church denounce it—not only as false but as immoral. *We* contend that it belongs to the very essence and substance of the Gospel.

What is it that comes between a man and God, when once the heart is restless to find Him? It is the remembrance of the sins which have provoked the Divine anger—anger so terrible that it is spoken of in Holy Scripture as the wrath of God—anger which is not inconsistent with love, for our anger against sin is

most intense when those whom we love are guilty of it. Nor is it only the remembrance of the sins of former years which fills the soul with terror. There is the consciousness of present inability to resist temptation, and to love and serve God perfectly. Penitence gives no comfort; for the deeper our distress becomes on account of our past sins and of our present sinfulness, the more deeply we feel that we are not penitent enough, and that as yet we cannot venture, on the ground of our penitence, to enter into the presence of God. Endeavours to do better give us no comfort; for when we earnestly try to do well, we become more and more dissatisfied with all our doings, and instead of relieving ourselves from the sense of the guilt which we have incurred already, we do but discover that the terrible and mysterious infection of sin has poisoned our life more completely than we thought.

Direct access to God! That may be possible to angels, possible to a few elect saints after years of discipline, of watching, and fasting, and prayer; but as yet it is not possible to us. Far on in the future there seems to shine a faint glory, which may perhaps some day be ours, if only we have strength and endurance to travel along the rugged way of pain and suffering and self-denial; but as yet and for ourselves, access to the light in which God dwells is impossible.

It was revealed to Luther as it had been revealed to St. Paul, that the Divine mercy transcends all the measures of human hope; and he declared that at once, for Christ's sake, the weakest and guiltiest of our race may receive absolution from the very lips of God, and have access by Christ into that grace wherein all saintly souls have stood. God is "nigh at hand," not "afar off." This was the Gospel which Luther preached, and which came to

the heart of Europe like the light of the morning after a dark and desolate night, and made those who receive it glad with an unutterable joy. Penances, ascetic discipline, the scourging of the body and the worse scourging of the soul, a cheerless life of tears and conflict, ungladdened by the glory which shines from the face of God—these, he said, are not necessary, before God will be at peace with you, and justify you from all your sins. You can come to God at once; only trust in Him, and the chains of your guilt will fall from you as the chains of Peter fell at the touch of the angel; and you shall pass out of the gloom in which you have been imprisoned, into the clear light and perfect freedom of the kingdom of heaven. That was a Gospel worth preaching; and it was the very substance of all that the Reformers had to say to Christendom. They proclaimed direct access to God, not for saints alone, but for sinners;

sinners need it almost more than saints. They need it, to be sure that their sins are forgiven, and to inspire them with strength to sin no more.

As in the third generation of Protestantism the Bible gradually came to be treated as though it were only an authoritative and external rule, instead of a fountain of light, so the doctrine of Justification by Faith was gradually hardened into a mere dogma, with no power or glory in it. I cannot indeed read, without keen intellectual interest, the intricate discussions on the great article of the Protestant Faith which are to be found in the books of the Protestant theologians of the seventeenth century—their rigorous statements of the doctrine, as though it were a mathematical formula, their exact definitions of the objections to it, their formidable confutations of all who opposed it, their massive demonstrations of its truth; but for me, to speak of it calmly,

to explain it, to argue about it, seems hardly possible. When once it is seen and known, it thrills the heart with rapture, the soul bursts into thanksgiving, and all that we can say of it seems almost inevitably to pass into song.

Come home to God, and come at once; and as soon as you come, the Father you have forgotten will throw His arms around you, and tell you that there is still a place for you in the fair mansions of the heavenly city, and that in His own heart your place has never been lost;—transform this into a doctrine, and you have the doctrine of Justification by Faith.

To all hesitating questions, Protestantism has but one reply—You may trust God, and trust Him perfectly, and trust Him now. If you think that the Holy One must express His sense of the evil of sin before He forgives you, Protestantism reminds you that He expressed it fully when He surrendered His own Son

to death as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. If you think that before He forgives, there must be on your part adequate repentance for sin, Protestantism tells you that when you begin to repent of sin you must not wilfully continue in sin, and that the first sin that you should abandon is the sin of distrusting the infinite love of God. If you ask whether your faith must not be of the right kind, Protestantism answers that there can be no faith of the right kind while you hesitate to commit yourself to the Divine mercy and power revealed through Christ, that God asks you to leave everything to Him and to receive everything from Him —to go home to Him at once, without a single argument why He should save you but this, that Christ died to save all mankind. If you say, "But surely I must go to God in a right state of mind, or God will not receive me," Protestantism answers that it is easy enough to believe that God will receive you if you go

to Him in a right state of mind; but that the wonderful manifestation of His love through Christ assures us that He will receive us although we go to Him with imperfect penitence, faltering faith, and with no firmness of purpose to sin no more. The only "right state of mind" in which to go to God, is to go to Him, confessing that there are innumerable reasons why He should reject you, and only one why He should receive you—that your sins have been atoned for by His own infinite love.

The doctrine, when the life passes out of it becomes, not immoral, but powerless. While the life is in it, it is the mightiest of all forces in redeeming men from a sinful life. What a sinful man who desires to do better most sorely needs, is the assurance, that for him,—sinner as he is, and before he becomes any better,—there is direct access, not to a priest, who will speak to Him in God's name, but to God Him-

self. Let a sinful man once have faith enough to return to God, and to commit himself to God's great love, and I can leave him in God's presence and in God's hands, with the full conviction that God will teach and incline him to forsake all sin.

CONCLUSION.

Conclusion.

IT would be easy to show that the principle which assumes one form in our vindication of the Right of Private Judgment, another in our contention for the authority of Holy Scripture, and another in the doctrine of Justification by Faith, is implicated in every controversy between Protestantism and Rome.

We reject the invocation of saints and the intercession of the Virgin, because we know that we can speak to God for ourselves. We refuse to confess our sins to a man, because we can confess them to God and receive absolution direct from His lips. We deny that the priests of any Church are necessary to

secure the Real Presence of Christ when we gather round His table; for wherever "two or three are gathered together" in the name of Christ, the Real Presence of Christ is with them; and when we sit as guests at His table, we are sure—whether a priest is present or not—that the Lord who invited us is there. The pageantry of the Romish ritual offends us; for when we worship we desire to forget all external pomp in the awful and glorious presence of the Most High. We refuse the excitement of an elaborate service, and believe that the reverence and wonder and rapture of worship should come, not from the solemn majesty of sacred buildings, nor the spectacle of gorgeous processions, nor even the perfection of noble music, but from the immediate vision of the Divine glory and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It is because Romanism and Ritualism—which is but Romanism without its logic, without its dignity, without its

great traditions—attempt to bar the immediate access of the soul to God, that I plead for loyalty to the Protestant faith. It is a faith which vindicates the infinite compassion and condescension of God. It reclaims from the usurpation of the priesthood the great prerogatives which are the inheritance of every Christian soul. It invests the Christian life with celestial dignity, and inspires it with transcendent power.

The Roman Church is not only unjust to the individual Christian; it strips the Church—the organised society of Christian men—of the honours and powers which are conferred on it by Christ, and which are necessary for the full manifestation of the glory of that kingdom of God on earth of which Christ is the Prince. In the Roman communion, the Church vanishes and only a priesthood is left; and by the recent decisions of the Vatican Council, the priesthood itself, in all its ranks, from the

lowest to the highest, is bound hand and foot, and delivered over to the despotic caprice of the Pope. To illustrate the intimate and direct relation of the ultimate principle of Protestantism to the true idea of the Church, and to show how that idea is, not so much travestied as suppressed, by Sacerdotal and Papal usurpations, would be to open another line of argument for fidelity to Protestantism and for resolute hostility to Rome.

In England and in some parts of the European continent, the severity of the conflict is increasing every day. It is the duty of every man that recognises in Protestantism the expression of the very spirit of the Gospel, to use all his resources to win for the right faith a real and enduring victory.

But we must use in this conflict only those weapons which are appropriate to a spiritual struggle and a struggle for spiritual freedom. I

confess that I am alarmed by the undiscriminating sympathy which has been shown in this country with the attempt of a great continental State to repress Romanism by means which appear to me altogether illegitimate. Some of the recent measures which have been adopted by Prussia are, indeed, sound in principle and in harmony with the true spirit of Protestantism; but others seem to me to violate the simplest maxims of political equity. Prince Bismark is, no doubt, in a position of extreme difficulty. To a people like the Germans, so rich in genius and in culture, and so passionate in their desire for the development of their characteristic national life and the vindication of their national unity, the pretensions of the Papacy are supremely irritating. Nor do I forget that the position of the Roman Catholic Bishops and Priests, as stipendiaries of the State, involves very intricate and perplexing questions as to the measure of ecclesiastical

freedom which they have a right to claim. The temptations of the Prussian Government to lay a heavy hand on Ultramontanism are very strong; but it is the duty of Englishmen, who can look on the German struggle with a calmness of judgment which Germans themselves can hardly be expected to command, and who inherit the noble results of our protracted struggle for religious liberty, to let their voice be heard on the side of Justice.

The course which a Government should follow is plain. Whenever, and under whatever pretext, men invade each other's civil rights and disturb the peace of the State, the authority of the State should interfere. If a priest at the altar provokes resistance to the civil authority, the sanctity of the altar should not shelter him; I would try the priest before the common tribunals, and I would punish him just as severely as I would punish any other man for using the same language in any

other place. If a priest conspires against the State, I would not let his priestly character protect him against the penalties inflicted on other men for conspiracy. If, under the name of excommunication, a priest utters a public slander on the character of any citizen, let the priest be tried for slander, and let him be punished for it.

But to pass special laws for the restraint of the priesthood, to impose oaths and restrictions which invade the sanctuary of conscience, to submit strictly ecclesiastical censures to review by civil courts, to oppose the pretensions of the Papacy by interfering with the education of priests and the nomination of bishops—this is a monstrous violation of the fundamental principles of Protestantism.

It is to follow the evil traditions which descend to us from those evil times when Rome ruled Europe with a rod of iron, and used the secular power to crush and to

destroy the truths which are dearest to us. Protestantism is the natural ally of justice, of equal rights, of the largest freedom. It rejects with loathing and scorn the instruments of oppression—the manacles and the fetters which were forged in other days to enslave the conscience of mankind. *

It is necessary to warn even English Protestants against the guilt and danger of appealing to the civil power for the repression of ecclesiastical and theological opinions. When men's blood is heated by controversy, they are apt to forget the maxims and laws to which they did homage in their better moments. Already I have seen demands for the repeal of the Act which emancipated our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects from political disabilities.

Let us have faith in Truth. Let us have faith in God. Let us ask for nothing from humar

* See Note B.

Governments but liberty to preach the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. Let us not rely on the patronage of Thrones or the legislation of Parliaments. Let us reject for ourselves the deceptive and perilous and corrupting support which comes from alliance with political powers, and let us protest against inflicting any political disabilities on those who are opposed to us. Let us ask for Freedom, and nothing more. Asking for *that*, and only for *that*, on behalf of Protestantism, we shall have a right to protest against all concessions, on the part of our own Government or on the part of any of the Governments of Europe, to the lofty claims of the Papacy. We shall be especially able to protest against the employment of the national resources for the propagation in this country, either in churches or schools, of doctrines which must corrupt the national faith and prepare the way for the triumph of Romanism.

These are critical times; and even those whose hearts are loyal to the Protestant Faith may shrink from discharging the great duty of the hour. Quiet men are troubled by the agitation and tumult of conflict; kindly men dislike the bitterness which is too often provoked by theological discussion; timid men are afraid to avow their faith in principles which may seem to imperil the peace and even the existence of august and venerable institutions which are consecrated to them by a thousand pathetic and sacred associations. But in the presence of the dangers which now menace the fair inheritance of Truth and Freedom which we have received from our Protestant ancestors,—an inheritance which was won for us by the blood of martyrs, and for the defence of which, again and again, in her glorious history, England has put her very life in hazard,—no considerations of ecclesiastical or political expediency, no natural

reluctance to confront the storm and tempest of controversy, no cowardly dread of being charged with intellectual narrowness and bigotry, should hold us back from the great conflict and compel us by the restraints of an ignominious prudence, to hold our peace.

There is, perhaps, some reason to fear that in this country the great Protestant argument will suffer from being entangled with innumerable disputes which have only a legal or an historical interest. The nation generally cares very little for controversies about the true intention of the documents which define the theological compromise accepted by the English reformers three hundred years ago. Controversies about the colour and shape of priestly vestments and the position and genuflexions of the "celebrant" in the Lord's Supper, are equally destitute of all power to touch the deeper life and thought of the country. We must fight, not for the symbols of Protestantism, but

for its realities. To permit the questions which are controverted between ourselves and those who are endeavouring to Romanize the faith and worship of the nation, to sink into the hands of lawyers and ecclesiastical antiquarians will be to deprive our cause of all its spiritual grandeur and power. The battle must be fought on broader and deeper issues. We must preach the Gospel, and must entreat Christ to reveal how near He is to every human soul, and to manifest in our times as He has manifested in former days the greatness of His mercy and His might. The true defence of the nation against the power of the Papacy does not lie with politicians, nor with ecclesiastical courts, nor with controversialists. We must constantly reiterate that it is at once the duty and the right of every man to listen for himself to the voice of God, and to appeal for himself to the infinite mercy which in the death of Christ atoned for

the sins of mankind; and we must make it clear that in the whole of our controversy both with Romanism and Ritualism we are but vindicating this right and enforcing this duty.

Note A.

The exigencies of the argument on pages 51–64 would have been satisfied if I had limited it to maintaining, that to a Christian man to whom the glory of Christ has been revealed, and who is personally conscious of having received redemption through Him, the question of the *authority* of the Gospels and of the Epistles has a speculative rather than a practical interest. The documentary evidence, that a particular painting is the work of Titian, or of Correggio, may be very necessary to a man in the earlier years of his Art studies; but the time comes, when he recognises for himself the manner of the great Master, as ordinary men recognise the hand-writing of their friends. The direct intuition of the glory of God in the Christ of the Gospels, practically supersedes all discussions on the trustworthiness of the Evangelists; and the immediate knowledge of the Divine grace and power which are illustrated in the Epistles, relegates into a very secondary place all inquiries concerning the authority of the writers.

And I suppose that the faith of the vast majority of Christian people is a response to the direct appeal of the truths contained in the New Testament to their moral and spiritual nature. They were taught that it was

possible to find their way to God through Christ, and, without staying to consider on what evidence this rested, they verified the truth for themselves, and as soon as they verified it, their faith became independent of testimony.

But when the question of the historical trustworthiness of the four Gospels is once intelligently raised, it is probable that most men have to settle it on critical and historical grounds; although I believe that there are many whose intellectual difficulties are overborne by the moral and spiritual power of the history of Christ, and who, as the result of direct access to God through Him, have an immediate knowledge of the great spiritual facts of the Christian revelation long before their difficulties about the Christian documents receive a final solution.

Where faith falters, because the external evidence that we have in the New Testament a trustworthy account of the history of the Lord Jesus Christ seems inadequate, that external evidence should be fearlessly investigated, and I believe that, if there is no moral antagonism to the Christian revelation, the evidence will in most cases be ultimately accepted as satisfactory. In our times, and perhaps it was the same in most previous ages, the real difficulties of men are not with the evidence, but with the *facts*, and with the truths to which the facts bear testimony.

Note B.

A very able article by M. de Pressensé on the recent religious policy of Prussia appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for May 15th, 1873.

It may be contended that there are periods in the history of all nations when ecclesiastical and political affairs are so entangled with each other, that it becomes absolutely necessary for statesmen to depart from the political neutrality which I have contended they should observe in relation to rival creeds and churches. At the close of the sixteenth century, for instance, it may be plausibly argued that a Protestant prince was compelled to use all the resources of the State for the defence of Protestantism. I am not disposed to deny that there have been times in the history of Europe, and especially in the history of our own country, when it *seemed* at least absolutely necessary that, for their own protection, Protestant statesmen should adopt a policy which violated the principle which I have maintained on pages 96–98. Such great services were rendered, not to Protestantism alone, but to all the highest interests both of our own country and of Europe generally, by Elizabeth and William III., that the task of criticizing their policy and discriminating between what was justifiable and what was not, is rather an ungracious one.

But I am unable to discover that the defence which might fairly be urged for these great sovereigns can be urged on behalf of the recent legislation of Prussia. It is clearly the intention of the Prussian Government to use the whole power of the State in order to break down the faith of its Roman Catholic subjects in the Roman Catholic Church. The Government is using the power which it has acquired over the Church by subsidizing the priesthood, to separate both priest and people from communion with the Pope. That the State was in any real peril from its Roman Catholic subjects before this coercive legislation began, I do not believe ; and the attempt, in our times, to crush a faith by political power appears to me to be an indication of how slowly men learn those great lessons of justice which some of us had supposed had been illustrated with irresistible force in the history of Europe during the last century or two. It is also, I think, a proof that those persons who had imagined that "a religious war" was henceforth impossible in Christendom, were mistaken.

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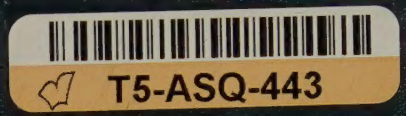
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